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ABSTRACT

Two teacher educators at the College of Charleston (South Carolina) undertook a project to learn more about what happens in a public high school classroom, in order to make their college instruction more realistic. The instructors taught an advanced senior English class in an inner city high school, and a group of college students from Education 324: Adolescent Growth and Development observed the classes. The objectives outlined for the college students were: (1) to develop observational skills; (2) to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate classroom behavior; (3) to observe selected instructional techniques, especially motivational devices, course content choices, instructional innovations, and teacher-pupil relationships; (4) look carefully at characteristics of adolescent behavior; and (5) help close the gap between theory and implementation of educational practices. The high school student objectives were to demonstrate an awareness of self in relation to others; think clearly and rationally, as manifested in discussion and composition; show an appreciation of aesthetic qualities in the community; show ability to clarify their values and refine their personal philosophies; and show an understanding of the educational resources available in the community. The teachers' objectives were to implement innovative teaching strategies, use democratic approaches to classroom management, understand adolescent behavior, and recognize and respond to the changing ideologies of American youth. It is concluded that the most important single outcome is that the project and resulting experience adds credibility to what the teachers profess in the college classroom. (MSE)

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BACK TO THE BASICS: COLLEGE PROFESSORS IN A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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HE 013 306

BACK TO THE BASICS: COLLEGE PROFESSORS
IN A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

"My dog wet on my paper" is not a comment the average college instructor hears from a student when assignment time is nigh. To the average high school teacher, however, that dampening response (cloaked, need we add, in euphemistic terms by the authors) is an everyday part of his academic world, a world very different from the one we often parlay by virtue of theory as the one awaiting our student teachers. To correct this misconception in our own as well as our students' eyes, we embarked upon a project to teach in one of our inner city schools, in the hope that our return to the American public school system would not only enhance our grassroots knowledge of the secondary school system, but also our credibility as teacher educators.

We set out as full of idealism and commitment as our student teachers. We risk giving away our "clincher" by saying that we returned in at least the same condition albeit in a much less nervous state. Our knees were quaking, our professorial tones far more squeaky than stentorian as we opened the door of English IV at The High School of Charleston to behold 30 faces--some far from angelic,--and all regarding us in total disinterest. Could we actually hope to obtain our objectives with such a seemingly indifferent audience?

Our objectives were threefold for our college students, our high school students and for us, the college instructors. The background of the project and objectives are as follows. We included forty-three

(43) College of Charleston juniors and seniors enrolled in Education 324: Adolescent Growth and Development. The number of college students participating was reduced from the original number outlined because of scheduling conflicts. The primary role of the college students was one of participating as observers. Thirty (30) seniors (29 black, 1 white) from the High School of Charleston enrolled in an advanced senior English course participated as recipients of instruction under a team teaching approach provided by the authors. The major thrust of the instructional program was that of exploring current issues of importance to the members of the adolescent subculture. Classes met for approximately one hour each Friday (throughout the fall semester) for nine class sessions.

The College Students

Objective 1: To develop appropriate observational skills the college students were given a set of criteria for promoting basic observational skills. A written summary of the experience was also required.

Based upon their remarks, most students were initially surprised to find little or no basis for their predetermined notions of what they expected within an inner-city school environment. To the contrary, the majority of the students indicated a very positive reaction to their experiences resulting from direct observation. Based on the formation of apparent changes in attitude as well as identifying areas of specified criteria with little or no difficulty, the objective was fully attained.

Objective 2: To distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate classroom behavior through the use of a selected management system.

Based on the age level, classification, and maturity of most of the high school students, the college students were primarily exposed

to a management system which basically reinforced positive behavior. Because of the lack of inappropriate behavior on the part of the high school students, experiences in observing the strengths of controlling behavior were not observed. Therefore, the attainment of the objectives was determined with respect to observing positive behavior; however, comparative data was unavailable to adequately elicit the distinction desired between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Objective 3: To observe selected instructional techniques giving specific attention to motivational devices, choices of course content as related to performance levels, utilization of instructional innovations, and teacher-pupil relationships.

Depending on the specific class session observed, the college students were exposed to one or more of the following motivational techniques and innovations employed: role playing, spontaneous drama, small group discussion, facilitating discussion, debate, and projective techniques. The college students were further interested in the utilization of team teaching. Several college students did indicate that they were disappointed to observe the lack of formal lecturing; however, from our experience we have found that the lecture method is not always appropriate for the secondary student.

The college students were positive in their comments concerning student-teacher rapport. Since Mrs. Wray was a former teacher at the High School of Charleston, an established relationship existed which provided an excellent foundation from the very beginning of the project.

Attainment of the objective was, for the most part, fully met. Because the college students were only required one observation in

order to accommodate the size of personnel in the classroom, it was impossible for each student to view all the techniques employed.

Objective 4: To shape and refine skills in determining major characteristics of adolescent behavior.

The objective was fully attained. The college students were able to observe typical adolescent behavior from a number of sources including pre-class activities as well as activities employed during the class session. From our viewpoint a number of concepts included in the course, Adolescent Growth and Development, were substantially verified and reinforced pertaining to typical adolescent behavior.

Objective 5: To resolve the "gap" between theoretical educational positions and actual implementation of educational practices.

Attainment of this objective was mixed. Some college students were unable to associate theory with practice, while other college students were rather perceptive in making the association.

The High School Students

Objective 1: To demonstrate an awareness of self in relation to others.

Through the use of supportive group techniques of role-playing, sociodrama, discussion and debate, the students were able to be open and honest about their feelings. As the experience progressed, those students who were initially hesitant about sharing their thoughts with the class appeared to gain confidence in speaking out. Student contributions revealed evidence of a growing understanding of self and a sensitivity to others' needs as well,

and at all times were received positively by class members. Class feedback indicated increased empathy, understanding and acceptance.

Objective 2: To demonstrate an ability to think clearly and rationally as manifested in discussion and composition.

Through the use of periodicals, poetry selections and films as springboards to thinking, the students wrote several papers on the following themes: a quest for identity, the importance of significant others in their lives, and their expectations of future societies. Emphasis was on content rather than mechanics, and ideas generated appeared to be well thought out and organized. Discussions showed many students to be extremely perceptive, and at times revealed a depth of maturity beyond their years; observing college students were most favorable impressed with the quality of student contributions.

Objective 3: To demonstrate an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities to be found in the community.

By relating the topics under discussion to students' lives, they came to view their everyday existence in more objective ways that revealed the implicit richness of their heritage. Students focused attention on areas of their lives often undervalued. Unfortunately the exigencies of time and scheduling problems did not allow participation in community cultural events as originally planned.

Objective 4: To demonstrate an ability to clarify

their values and refine their own personal philosophies.

Reading materials were chosen to enhance a values clarification approach in interpretation. A specific values clarification exercise was implemented in response to class reaction to a film and subsequent written assignment. Throughout the experience class members demonstrated behaviors that indicated increased reflection, greater awareness of choices in their lives, and the need for wise decision-making in self-direction.

Objective 5: To demonstrate an understanding of the educational resources available to them in the community.

Students were exposed to two College of Charleston instructors and a weekly audience of College of Charleston students, who interacted with them on occasion in small group work. Through involvement with this total group from the college, it is hoped that some negative attitudes and beliefs espoused by the local community about the College of Charleston will undergo change in a positive direction. The high school students were extremely receptive to the college instructors, appeared to feel very comfortable about the presence of the college students, and welcomed them into small student groups. Hopefully as much affective as well as cognitive learning occurred in this experience among all members.

The College Instructors

Objective 1: To implement innovative teaching strategies.

During the nine class sessions of instruction, eight of the sessions

utilized the team-teaching approach which was the primary framework from which developed further teaching strategies such as role playing, spontaneous drama, debate, small group discussions, audio-visual approaches, and large group discussion. Innovational practices were determined according to the specific nature of the topic and content. Based on the limited number of class sessions, the objective was fully attained. Students commented in a very positive manner about their continued anticipation of class each week. (And, music to the ears of any teacher, groans were heard from the class when the closing bell was sounded!)

Objective 2: To utilize democratic approaches to classroom management.

Utilization of a classroom management system was held to a minimum because the high school students maintained responsible and mature behavior throughout the term of the project. All that was necessary was an occasional reminder to enthusiastic students about the basic ground rule that one person speak at a time so that everyone's contributions might be appreciated by the group.

Objective 3: To understand adolescent behavior

Because both instructors have been closely identified in working with adolescents both formally and informally prior to the project, behavior patterns observed were reinforced as opposed to discovering "further insight" into today's adolescent.

Objective 4: To recognize and respond to the changing nature of the ideologies of American youth.

Based on the group of high school students with whom we were associated, we found their attitudes and ideologies to be optimistic and unusually conservative. Most students reflected the views of their parents as well as their immediate community, and reinforced the tenet that socioeconomic level rather than racial or sexual factors determined their views.

With the completion of the project and our return back to our college-level classes, there has been time for reflection. We made it through the experiences and indeed we are better off from gaining our renewed professional association with adolescents. Perhaps the most single important outcome has been that when our college students view us as educators dangling from the cobweb of old and outdated experiences, we can look at them straight in the eye and say, "we've been there--in fact, it was just yesterday!"